

CONCERNED ABOUT A LOVED ONE'S GAMBLING?

Thousands of Missourians have a loved one who is struggling with a gambling problem. Problem gambling includes all gambling behavior patterns that cause problems in at least one area of life – such as personal, family, social, occupational, legal, or financial. Addictions, including compulsive gambling, are chronic, progressive diseases that can be fatal if untreated.

People naturally want to try and help the ones they love overcome such a devastating life problem, and addiction does respond to treatment. Attempting to help someone you love overcome their (gambling) addiction is a difficult and challenging task. Educate yourself about your loved one's addiction. Addiction responds best to early recognition, intervention, and treatment.

Understanding problem and compulsive gambling

- Problems with gambling range from single incidents (such as over-spending) to compulsive (pathological) gambling.
- Compulsive gambling is a progressive behavior disorder in which an individual has an uncontrollable preoccupation and urge to gamble, emotional dependence on gambling, and loss of control.
- The compulsive gambler gets the same effect from gambling as someone else might get from drinking alcohol, taking a tranquilizer, or taking cocaine.
- Problem gambling is an emotional problem that has financial consequences. Unfortunately, this is frequently compounded by the problem gambler's irrational belief that gambling is the solution to the financial problems they have encountered
- Neither the amount of time spent gambling nor the amount of money lost or won determines when gambling becomes a problem. Rather, gambling becomes a problem when it negatively impacts any area of the gambler's life.

Get involved

The person with an addiction often cannot see the addiction as clearly as an outsider can. Therefore they need someone to get involved, to talk about the problem honestly and openly, and to give them feedback.

- Preaching doesn't help and neither does talking to a person when they are under the influence.
- Feedback needs to be direct, specific, and behavioral. For example, "Last night you said you would be back from gambling by 9. You didn't get home until after midnight and I was worried."
- Educate yourself about problem gambling, its effect on the gambler and their loved ones, guidelines for recovery, and the resources available in your area.
- Realize that you cannot force the gambler to stop gambling.
- Protect your financial security. For information on how to protect yourself financially, request or download a copy of *"Personal Financial Strategies for the Loved Ones of Problem Gamblers"* from the Missouri Alliance to Curb Problem Gambling.
- Accept that you have the right to protect yourself physically and emotionally.

- If your loved one's addiction is impacting their children, you may need to take steps to ensure the children are safe from harm and neglect.
- Perhaps most importantly, seek help for yourself. Don't try to do it alone, isolation can encourage hopelessness and fear.

Don't take their pain away

A problem or compulsive gambler will usually not develop motivation to change without some pain. The natural consequences of addiction cause pain, therefore you don't have to create extra. However, you do have to get out of the way of the pain and let the person you love feel it. This is a difficult task for many people. It's hard to stand back and let someone you love suffer. We often want to take away their pain. Just keep in mind that if you take away their pain, you also take away their motivation to change. Do not cover up, pay their financial obligations, make excuses or in any way shield them from the natural consequences of their behavior. Do not allow yourself to take responsibility, or feel guilty for the loved one's behavior.

Get help yourself

Discuss the problem with someone you trust that has specific training or experience with problem or compulsive gambling. Develop a support system for yourself. Gam-Anon is a 12-step support group specifically for anyone who feels they have been affected by another's gambling problem. Gam-Anon is more about helping you than helping the person with the addiction. Missouri also offers free compulsive gambling treatment services for the family members of a problem gambler. Family members can access the free treatment regardless of whether or not the problem gambler seeks treatment. If you have questions or need guidance, please contact the problem gambling help line, a certified compulsive gambling counselor, or other mental health provider.

Get more information

Problem gambling help line ~ 1-888-BETS OFF (1-888-238-7633) *available 24 hours a day*

Missouri Division of Alcohol & Drug Abuse ~ 800-575-7480 *available during regular business hours*

Missouri Gaming Commission ~ 1-573-526-4080 *available during regular business hours*

Missouri Alliance to Curb Problem Gambling <http://www.888betsoff.org>

Gamblers Anonymous <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org>

Gam-Anon <http://www.gam-anon.org>

National Council on Problem Gambling <http://www.ncpgambling.org>

Nevada Council on Problem Gambling <http://www.nevadacouncil.org>

Women Helping Women Recovery Newsletters <http://www.femalegamblers.org>

Sources

National Council on Problem Gambling

Nevada Council on Problem Gambling

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed, 1994), American Psychiatric Association

National Gambling Impact Study Commission Final Report (1999)



For more information,
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